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ABSTRACT

The current conditions of home workers in the garment industry in Toronto, Canada, were examined through in-depth telephone interviews with 30 Chinese-speaking immigrant women who were employed as home workers in 1999. The paper dicusses the formal training and informal learning experiences of immigrant woman who are garment workers. A comparison of the results of the 1999 survey with those of similar surveys conducted in 1991 and 1993 revealed that the wages of sewing machine operators remained at the levels of the 1980s. Many subcontractors were circumventing the Employment Standards Act's provisions protecting home workers. Instead of receiving wage increases as they became more experienced, many home workers were actually "punished" for getting skilled. Most women were paid by check every 2 weeks and reported few problems getting paid. Although many women preferred home work because it gave them more flexibility and a chance to combine paid work with child care, many others expressed feeling internal pressures from having to work all the time and meet the multiple demands of household, family, and employment. The following were among common problems reported by the women: (1) not learning the piece rate until garments were completed; (2) no vacation pay despite the legislative provisions calling for paid vacations; and (3) no avenues of compensation for work-related health problems (repetitive strain syndrome, back pain). Education of the public and policymakers and broad-based action on the part of homeworkers and the government are needed. (Contains 19 endnotes) (MN)

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NALL Working Paper #06-1999

# HOMEWORKING: HOME OFFICE OR HOME SWEATSHOP?

## Report on Current Conditions of Homeworkers in Toronto's Garment Industry

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Thanks must first go to the thirty women who agreed to speak with us at length about their lives as homeworkers, although for obvious reasons they will go unnamed. Without them this study would not have been possible.

Thanks must also go to the two indispensable members of the research team. Renita Yuk-lin Wong is a research assistant of every principal investigator's dream. She was central to the study from design to execution. Her intelligence, industry, good sense, and grounding in community-based work made the research process exciting and enjoyable for me. Angela Choi, the coordinator of the Homeworkers' Association at the time of the study, paved the way for our rapport with the women. She also conducted half the interviews and assisted with the other half. Her feedback on the draft of this report is much

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appreciated.

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Finally, thanks must go to the funder of this study, especially Dr. David Livingstone, the Principal Investigator of the Network for New Approaches to Lifelong Learning (NALL), at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. The shortcomings of the report are, of course, mine alone.

Roxana Ng
Toronto, Ontario
June, 1999.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the 1990s, as employment patterns fluctuate and work place restructuring becomes the norm rather than the exception, homeworking -conducting one's paid employment from the privacy of one's domicile- is heralded as the viable and preferred alternative to a more structured work environment. By examining the working conditions of women who sew garments at home (heretofore homeworkers), this study discovers that this rosy and romantic picture of homeworking, painted by the media and encouraged by governments and employers, does not apply to everyone who does home work. Although homeworking seems to provide both the homeworker and the employer/client more flexibility, and certainly reduces overhead costs for the employer, specific conditions of homeworking vary across occupational sectors and from individual to individual. They are shaped by factors such as the occupational strata, education, class, gender, and above all family responsibilities of the homeworker. For example, the experience of a professional man who operates a consulting business from his residence is very different from that of garment workers, many of them immigrant women with low English language proficiency, who sew at home for subcontractors because they cannot afford daycare services.[1]

This report focuses on the conditions of sewers who are homeworkers in the Greater Toronto Area. Through in-depth and telephone interviews with thirty (30) homeworkers who are immigrant women from Asia (Hong Kong, China, and Vietnam), this study adds to present knowledge on the conditions of homeworkers in Toronto and raises questions about the popular image of homeworking as the desired alternative to full-time, stable and office- or factory-based employment. Although we had a relatively unique and small sample due to the difficulty of identifying homeworkers,[2] our findings are fairly consistent with previous studies conducted by the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) in 1991 and 1993. Our report is therefore a starting point for further investigation into the organization of the changing garment industry, and the impact of these changing on workers in Canada and internationally.[3]

## BACKGROUND

This report is part of a study on 'Labour Adjustment and Job Training Programs: Implications for Immigrant Women Workers' funded by the Network for New Approaches to Lifelong Learning (NALL),

which is in turn a research network funded by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRCC). Its overall aim is to understand the relationship between formal, non-formal, and informal learning.[4] My study in NALL focuses specifically on training opportunities available to immigrant women workers as a result of industrial restructuring, and what they learn from the formal curriculum and from each other (namely informal learning). I chose the Ontario District Council of UNITE (Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees)[5] as a case study because (a) as the largest union in the garment sector, UNITE has intimate knowledge of how restructuring in that sector has affected workers, many of whom are immigrant women; (b) the Toronto Regional of UNITE has launched many innovative initiatives to ameliorate the detrimental effects of downsizing on garment workers. I chose to study the garment sector because I have had prior working knowledge of the sector.[6] I further decided to look at the issue of re-training and informal learning in relation to homeworkers because they are a relatively disadvantaged population in the sector.

The ILGWU has conducted two surveys on the working conditions of Chinese-speaking homeworkers in 1991 and 1993.[7] These surveys, as the present study, focused on Chinese-speaking workers because they form the majority of home workers in Greater Toronto. Based on the result of the 1991 survey and organizing efforts by the Coalition for Fair Wages and Working Conditions for Homeworkers, the Homeworkers Association was formed in early 1992 as a project of the Toronto District Council of ILGWU to coordinate activities of many garment workers who have become homeworkers as a result of the restructuring of the garment sector.[8] These surveys formed the background for the present study. This component of the study updates the previous surveys by examining the changes that may have occurred in the working conditions of home workers since 1993.

## THE SUBJECTS

The survey is part of a larger qualitative study that investigates the formal training and informal learning experiences of immigrant women who are garment workers. The homeworkers survey consisted of interviews with thirty Chinese- speaking workers living in the Greater Toronto Area.[9] Out of the thirty workers, seventeen of them are from China, eleven from Hong Kong, and two from Vietnam. The majority of them (twenty-five) have been in Canada for more than five years. Eleven of them have been in the country for over ten years. All live with their families, and have one to three children. About half the workers interviewed (fourteen) have had over ten years experience in the garment industry. Eight have more than twenty years experience. Only three workers have less than four years of experience in the industry, indicating that almost all the workers have been sewing machine operators prior to migration, and that they are highly experienced workers. Although none of the workers are sole wage earners, their wages are indispensable in sustaining the family income.

The interviews were conducted with the help of an interview guide developed by Renita Wong, Research Assistant, with input from me, Alex Dagg and Angela Choi. They were conducted in Chinese in a conversational manner; about half were tape recorded. The findings presented here were summarized from detailed notes or transcripts, which were translated from Chinese to English by Renita Wong. Although every effort was made to cover all the questions in the interview guide, this was not always possible due to the nature of garment work. For example, women have a hard time giving us an average piece rate or hourly rate, because it varies from batch to batch, and from one type of garment to another. Moreover, the speed of work is dependent on the complexity of the section of a garment. Thus, the piece rate and hourly wage of even a skilled and experienced worker vary a great deal.

To protect the women from possible repercussions from employers, we did not ask for the names of their sub-contractors. One interesting finding is that all but two workers are not given labels to sew on the garments. In the 1993 survey, Jan Borowy found that labels were given to homeworkers routinely. We speculate that this is a strategic change made by subcontractors, manufacturers, and retailers to keep workers ignorant. With the labels, it would be easy for the workers and those working with them (such as UNITE) to trace the manufacturers and retailers, to keep track of those violating employment standards. Now, it is impossible to do so, thereby substantially weakening homeworkers' organizing capacity and bargaining power.

## RESULTS

Generally, the findings of this study are very similar to the 1991 and 1993 surveys conducted by the ILGWU, and other studies looking at homework.[10]

Wages and Benefits

The wages of sewing machine operators have not arisen since the 1980s. In her classic study in, The Seams Allowance: Industrial Home Sewing in Canada, Laura Johnson[11] reported that the piece rate for skirts was $2. Today, workers also make $2 for a skirt. A shirt is around $3, and a dress pays $4-5. These are clothing that are retailed for up to $200. For section work (that is, sewing on pockets or collars), workers make between 20 to 50 cents per piece. Based on the piece rate and number of items completed per hour, we estimate the hourly rate as follows:

> Average hourly rate: $6-8
> Lowest hourly rate: $2
> Highest hourly rate: $17 (evening gowns)
> (Note that the lowest and highest rates were reported by two workers only, indicating that these are unique.
> The majority reported a low rate of $3, and a high rate of $12-13.)

The Employment Standards Act states that the minimum wage is $6.85 per hour. For homeworkers, the Act stipulates that ten percent should be added to cover overhead costs, bringing the minimum wage for homeworkers up to $7.54 per hour. According to this figure, most workers interviewed make around the minimum wage range. What is more critical to note is that as homeworkers become skilled at what they are sewing, and begin to make more than minimum wage, the employers drop the piece rate so they earning is effectively reduced. For example, one woman reported that depending on the complexity of the design, she used to get $3-4 per skirt; now she is paid $2.80-3. This finding concurs with a larger study on the garment trade, which reported on a decline in the piece rate.[12]

Another strategy used by sub-contractors is to not disclose the piece rate until the batch of garments is completed, as the following interview shows:

> The lowest salary I earned was about $3 per hour, with the same employers I'm now working. [I asked why she didn't complain about the low rate.] I didn't say anything at the beginning. I dared not. But now I start to talk to them about this. The kind of pocket-cover sewing I'm now doing also requires me to cut certain fabric before I can start sewing. But the employers don't count the cutting time. I told the employers about this. But they said that almost every homeworker asks them for a raise. But they get no raise from their contractor who gives them the fabric. I don't know other homeworkers who also work for them. It would be better if I know. Their factory is very small. They only have two workers in their factory, plus some part-timers, and the two owners.
>
> The highest salary I earned was around $8 per hour. That was the beginning when I first worked for these employers, when they let me know the piece rate before I sewed. But now they don't tell me the piece rate before I sew.
>
> Every time I ask them for the piece-rate, they always say they haven't had time to think about it yet. At the beginning they gave me the piece-rate before I sewed. But now they don't. They never tell me the piece-rate until I finish sewing the garments.

In other words, contrary to the common notion that as workers become more experienced and skilled, their wages increase accordingly, it appears that homeworkers are being punished for getting skilled.[13]

Most workers are paid by cheques every two weeks, and have little problems getting paid. Some receive cash payments occasionally. Several workers did report on late payment or not being paid at all, as this woman told us:

I don't have very serious problem with getting paid. What sometimes may happen is getting late payment. One time there was this employer who owed me about $500-600. He admitted to it and kept saying sorry. But I still haven't got any pay from him. It was six to seven years ago. He later referred me to another sub-contractor, who sent the fabric from Montreal to his place. So I would go to his place to pick up the fabric and my pay. Another time, he asked me to lend him mony. I did. And he has never paid me back. I still see him from time to time, but I do not work for him any more.

Some of the problems mentioned by women are:

- employer would not give information on piece rate until the garments are completed;
- late payment or being paid less than the agreed upon rate;
- no vacation pay, but employers include vacation pay on the T4A issued at year end to give the appearance of conforming to employment standards.

In these situations, the women felt that their only recourse, after pursuing the employer repeatedly, was to discontinue work with a particular employer.

According to the Employment Standards Act of Ontario, homeworkers are entitled to four percent vacation pay, which must be included in the pay cheque. They are also entitled to over-time pay if they work more than forty-four hours per week. In reality, they are treated by employers as if they were self-employed. Our study found that only two workers receive vacation pay; none receive overtime pay. One worker, who sews for Linda Lundstrom, a well known Toronto designer, said that she always receives a year-end bonus. Lundstrom also throws an annual Christmas party for all her employees, both factory and home workers. In other words, most, if not all, employers violate provincial labour standards legislation.

Employers and Overhead Costs

According to the Employment Standards Act, employers who employ homeworkers must obtain a special work permit for their operation. When asked whether the subcontractors they work for have such a permit, none of the women knew. They assumed that their employers have permits since they are paid by cheques and receive T4A forms at year end for income tax purposes.

At the time of the interview, most women were working for one employer. Several worked for two to three employers simultaneously, if they did not get enough work from one person.

In order to be employed as homeworkers, women must own industrial quality sewing machines. All the women we interviewed own their sewing machines. A few also own a serger, which enable them to sew a larger variety of garments. The prices of their machines ranged from $300 to $2800, depending on when they purchased them and the type of machine purchased (for example whether it has auto-thread cutting). The woman who paid $300 for her machine purchased it in 1982, when she began working at home.

Although considered employees under the Ontario labour legislation, homeworkers are nevertheless responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of their machines. The woman who paid $300 for her machine said that she had been very lucky with hers, which needed very little upkeep until recently. She also had a very good and reasonable repair man, who did not charge a lot for house calls. Another woman, on the other hand, has purchased three sewing machines since she began working at home.

In addition, women pay for other overhead costs such as lighting and hydro. Some women have learned to deduct these expenses from their income tax claim, but others are either unaware that they can do so, or think that claiming expenses is too much work due to their lack of familiarity with English and dealing with bureaucratic procedures. Usually, threads for the garments are supplied by employers. However, one worker has to supply threads for the clothing she sews.

To be homeworkers, women have to have a designated area for their work. Most of the women we interviewed have a designated work space, usually in the basement of their homes. However, some

women have to share spaces with other family members, such as occupying a corner of the family room. The women live in apartments use part of the living or dining area for their home work.

Health and Safety Issues

Operating a sewing machine is repetitive work that requires attention to details. It is therefore not surprising that most women, like other workers who spend long hours doing something repeatedly, suffer from different kinds of repetitive strain syndrome. By far the greatest complaint is back pain, reported by fifteen workers. Four reported on shoulder pain, three neck pain, one knee pain, four numbness in arms, hands and fingers, and one eye strain.

Another health issue concerning homeworkers is allergy due to the dust produced by the fabric in the sewing process. Nine out of the thirty workers reported fairly serious allergies, such as itchiness, rashes, and stuffiness resulting from fabric dust.

These findings are consistent with the two surveys conducted by ILGWU in the early 1990s. Whereas allergic reactions were the chief complaints in the 1991 survey, both the 1993 and the present surveys found that back strain is the major concern.

Most women do not tell their employers work related health problems, because they don't think anything would result from complaining. Homeworkers are explicitly exempt from the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act. This means that they cannot claim compensation from the government in work-related injuries.

The women interviewed use a combination of methods to help alleviate problems associated with their work, including medication, physiotherapy, exercise, and rest. To reduce fabric dust, women vacuum often and keep the work area as dust free as possible. One woman, whose work space is a closet in the basement, closes the door to her work space as much as she can so other family members are not as affected by the dust.

In addition to these physical problems, women talked about the psychological pressure generated by work and family demands. Again, this is consistent with previous studies, as well as studies on women's paid and unpaid work in general. One woman said she even dreamed about sewing when she had to meet a deadline.

Working Hours: Merging the Public and Private Spheres

It is when we examine the working hours of homeworkers that the romantic myth of homeworking is completely shattered. Although women felt that they could make more money working in factories, especially in unionized plants,[14] women knew that this is not an option. Why?

The single most important reason given by women for homework is of child care, or rather the lack of affordable child care. Since wages for garment workers are low, they cannot afford to put their children in daycare centres or to hire private care. From their point of view, homeworking is a reasonable compromise that enables them to combine paid work and child care.

Closely related to child care is the fact that although women's paid work is central to sustaining the family income, they are also responsible for the lion share of household duties and care-giving for their family. Thus they must find ways to meet the multiple demands placed on them. It is in this context that homeworking becomes an attractive, rather than desirable, alternative for women in the garment trade. The women in the study gave three reasons for 'preferring' homework:

- homework is more flexible
- no supervisor and more able to manage own time
- able to combine paid work with child care

However, women also express the internal pressure they feel from having to meet the multiple demands

of household, family and employment. Although women are not supervised directly, they have to meet the deadline set by employers, or they may not be given more work. Almost half (thirteen out of thirty) women work ten to twelve hour days on their sewing. Seven work eight to nine hours. Seven work five to six hours. We do not have information on the remaining three workers. The narrative of this homeworker illustrates the pressure women felt combining paid employment and household responsibilities:

> I work eight to nine hours a day, about six days a week. My daily schedule usually starts with getting my kids ready for school at about 8 a.m., preparing their breakfast. After washing their dishes, I eat something and start working at about 9 a.m. until 12 noon. Then I eat something and go back down to work until the kids come back from school at about 3 p.m. I would make something for them to eat and get back to work after that until 6 p.m. Then I have to start preparing for dinner. If I do not have a rush job, I usually do not go back to the basement and work. But if it's in a rush, I would have to work again after dinner until 1 a.m. It's in fact quite often that we have to rush.

The major problem of homeworking is that it blurs the division between paid work and family life. Women tend to organize their sewing around the schedules of children and other family members, thus frequently sewing late into the night when they have to meet employer demands. Given a choice, some of the women said that they would prefer to work in a factory, because there is a clear beginning and end to the work day. Some of the problems raised by interviewees of homeworking are:

- irregular working hours and having to work all the time
- less focused when sewing because of distraction by household chores and children
- less stable income
- feeling confined at home and lack of knowledge of outside world except through the radio

One homeworker expressed her sentiment thus:

> I do not like to work at home. Working outside, I can meet and know more people. I also learn different things. Working at home, I only see my family members. And you don't have much time concept working at home. Sometimes you may go to sleep, or watch TV in-between. There is no work routine, I don't like it. When I was young, I liked to go out. I didn't like to hide and confine myself at home. I felt bored. And I felt that when I didn't have a chance to go out and meet more people, I felt myself out of touch with the society.

Contrary to other studies[15] indicating that family members were frequently involved in helping with homework, most workers in this survey do not involve family members in their work. Three workers said their husbands help with delivering the garments. Three have their children help them turn clothes inside out. In fact, many said that other family members help out minimally in other family duties as well. This means that women carry a double burden, taking almost total responsibility for waged and un-waged work.

## SUMMARY

To summarize, we found that

- the piece rate in the garment sector has not increased since the 1980s (In fact, this and other studies indicate a decline in the piece rate);
- there is widespread violation of the Employment Standards Act by employers;
- garment workers continue to suffer physical and emotional ailments due to their occupation but receive no compensation under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act;
- homeworking merges the public and private spheres creating additional pressures for women workers who have to juggle the demands of paid work and family responsibilities.

## WHAT CAN BE DONE?

In view of the complexity of homeworking and severity of problems facing immigrant garment workers who are homeworkers, there is no easy solution. It is beyond the scope of this report to discuss the policy options and other strategies for improving the working conditions of homeworkers.[16] By way of a conclusion I will highlight, below, some of the areas that require attention.

Education

It seems that one of the perennial problems facing homeworkers is the lack of understanding, by employers, decision makers and ordinary Canadians, of the multiple demands placed on women's lives regardless of their education, economic positions and income levels. This includes the lack of affordable child care for the majority of Canadian families, who juggle paid work, family and child care responsibilities on a daily basis. Whereas women with high incomes can purchase child care, women earning low wages such as homeworkers are stuck with attempting to find solutions on an individual basis.

Furthermore, there is a real ignorance among Canadians of the working conditions of garment workers in general, and homeworkers in particular. It is often assumed that sweatshop operations and homeworking is a third world phenomenon, when in fact garment workers around the world face similar predicaments. Thus, much more needs to be done in public education to draw attention to the conditions of homeworkers and garment workers in the Canadian context. This includes

- disrupting the romantic myth of homeworking as the solution to labour market re-organization,
- bringing to light the lack of changes in household arrangements, and
- making the link between conditions of homeworkers in the garment sector in Canada and in developing countries.

There is also a lot that can be done to provide better consumer information on the manufacturing of garments. Public education needs to be a joint effort among researchers, educators, policy and decision makers, and activists.

Collective Action

Given that sweatshop operations and homeworking is a widespread phenomenon, broad-based action is needed. There are currently many coalitions, both within Canada and internationally, that are working to eliminate sweatshop operations and improve the working conditions for garment workers.[17] Nationally, these groups are pressuring manufacturers, retailers, and governments to improve protection for garment workers through developing codes of conduct, through legislative reforms, and through better monitoring practices. Internationally, these groups call for the inclusion of protective measures for garment workers in international trade agreements.[18]

At the home front, so to speak, a central registry for homeworkers could be developed to bring homeworkers together for better comparison and monitoring of their working conditions. At present, because homeworking is such an invisible phenomenon in Ontario, it is difficult to organize homeworkers. While UNITE provides associate membership for members of the Homeworkers' Association, it cannot bargain on their behalf because they are not unionized, for obvious reasons. As well, the Homeworkers' Association is supported by short-term grants, which curtails its effectiveness in mass-based organizing.

Government Action

Federally, the government can take more proactive measures to monitor the practices of manufacturers and retailers, and to address the issue of sweatshop operations in international trade agreements. The Government of Canada has just appointed a facilitator to set up a task force to respond 'to public concern regarding production conditions of consumer goods sold in Canada.'[19] Based on the findings of this study, it is my view that if such a task force is indeed established, it needs to pay attention, not only to the practices of corporations abroad, but also within Canada.

Provincially, the Ministry of Labour needs to conduct more proactive audits and monitoring of employers to ensure that they do not violate labour standards. One way to do this is to allow homeworkers to launch complaints of employers anonymously. The Ontario government should also look at legislative changes to better protect vulnerable workers. One suggestion that has been made is to implement joint liability legislation that holds contractors, manufacturers and retailers jointly responsible for the working conditions of garment workers. In this regard, the recent passing of Bill 633 in the State of California is a step forward in addressing the local conditions of garment production.

In short, eliminating sweatshop conditions for garment workers require the joint efforts of many players: governments, manufacturers, retailers, workers' organizations, academics and educators, policy makers, as well as an informed public. It requires different kinds of action: organizing home workers and garment workers, ongoing research and monitoring, development of codes of conduct for employers, legislative reforms and provisions in international trade agreements. But because it is human action that produced the conditions we find, it is also possible to change them.

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**Stories by Homeworkers**

On Working Hours, Work and Family Responsibilities

I work eight to nine hours a day, about six days a week. My daily schedule usually starts with getting my kids ready for school at about 8 a.m., preparing their breakfast. After washing their dishes, I eat something and start working at about 9a.m. until 12 noon. Then I eat something and go back down to work until the kids come back from school at about 3 p.m. I would make something for them to eat and get back to work after that until 6 p.m. Then I have to start preparing for dinner. If I do not have a rush job, I usually do not go back to the basement and work. But if it's in a rush, I would have to work again after dinner until 1 a.m. It's in fact quite often that we have to rush.

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On Piece Rate, Wages, and Employer's Practices

The lowest salary I earned was about $3 per hour, with the same employers I'm now working. [I asked why she didn't complain about the low rate.] I didn't say anything at the beginning. I dared not. But now I start to talk to them about this. The kind of pocket-cover sewing I'm now doing also requires me to cut certain fabric before I can start sewing. But the employers don't count the cutting time. I told the employers about this. But they said that almost every homeworker asks them for a raise. But they get no raise from their contractor who gives them the fabric. I don't know other homeworkers who also work for them. It would be better if I know. Their factory is very small. They only have two workers in their factory, plus some part-times, and the two owners.

The highest salary I earned was around $8 per hour. That was the beginning when I first worked for these employers, when they let me know the piece rate before I sewed. But now they don't tell me the piece rate before I sew.

Every time I ask them for the piece-rate, they always say they haven't had time to think about it yet. At the beginning they gave me the piece-rate before I sewed. But now they don't. They never tell me the piece-rate until I finish sewing the garments.

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On Comparing Home Work with Factory Work

I do not like to work at home. Working outside, I can meet and know more people. I also learn different things. Working at home, I only see my family members. And you don't have much time concept working at home. Sometimes you may go to sleep, or watch TV in-between. There is no work routine, I don't like it. When I was young, I liked to go out. I didn't like to hide and confine myself at home. I felt bored. And I felt that when I didn't have a chance to go out and meet more people, I felt myself out of touch with the society.

On Getting Paid

I don't have very serious problem with getting paid. What sometimes may happen is getting late payment. One time there was this employer who owed me about $500-600. He admitted to it and kept saying sorry. But I still haven't got any pay from him. It was six to seven years ago. He later referred me to another sub-contractor, who sent the fabric from Montreal to his place. So I would go to his place to pick up the fabric and my pay. Another time, he asked me to lend him mony. I did. And he has never paid me back. I still see him from time to time, but I do not work for him any more.

**NOTES**

1. One study that compares two groups of homeworkers is 'Unions Confront Work Reorganization and the Rise of Precarious Employment: Home-Based Work in the Garment Industry and Federal Public Service' by Jan Borowy & Theresa Johnson in a collection edited by Christopher Schenk & John Anderson entitled, Re-shaping Work: Union Responses to Technological Change (Toronto: Ontario Federation of Labour, 1995). For specific case studies of work restructuring, see the same collection.

2. By and large, one can say homeworkers who sew garments at home are part of the informal economy, in that they are invisible in official employment statistics. They are extremely isolated, and therefore vulnerable to exploitation and manipulation. It is therefore not easy to access this group of workers, accounting for the difficulty in getting hard facts and figures about them. It is only because of their trust in the Homeworkers' Association that they agreed to be interviewed for this study.

3. For a comprehensive Canadian study, see Policy Options to Improve Standards for Garment Workers in Canada and Internationally by Lynda Yanz, Bob Jeffcott, Deena Ladd, Joan Atlin of the Maquila Solidarity Network (Ottawa: Status of Women Canada, January 1999).

4. According to the official release of NALL, the objectives of the Network are to document current relations between informal learning and formal/nonformal education, identify major social barriers to integrating informal learning with formal/nonformal programs and certification, and support new program initiatives that promise to overcome such barriers.

5. UNITE is a new union resulting from a merger between the ILGWU and ACTWU (Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers' Union) in 1995.

6. Between 1990 and 1994, I was involved in two activities pertaining to the garment sector. Firstly, I was appointed the chair of a sector-wide labour adjustment committee, the Apparel and Textile Action Committee (ATAC), to oversee the adjustment of workers in that sector due to restructuring. Secondly, I was one of the academic resource persons for the Ontario Federation of Labour in TARP (Technology Adjustment Research Project) funded by the Ontario NDP government to understand the effects of technological changes on workers. I was assigned to a project by UNITE! funded by TARP.

7. See 'Working Conditions of Chinese-speaking Homeworkers in the Tronto Garment Industry: Summary of the Results of a Survey Conducted by the International Ladies Garment Workers Union' by Dr. Barbara Cameron (1991) and 'ILGWU 1993 Homeworkers' Study: an investigation into wages and working conditions of Chinese-speaking homeworkers in Metropolitan Toronto' by Jan Borowy (1993).

8. See 'Chronology of ILG/UNITE!, 1990-1998' prepared by Renita Y.L. Wong for this study.

9. The Homeworkers' Association's estimates there are about 6,000 homeworkers in the Greater Toronto Area. This figure is conservative because many homeworkers remain underground as part of the informal, and therefore undocumented, work force.

10. For example, Laura Johnson and Robert Johnson, The Seam Allowance: Industrial Home Sewing in Canada ( Toronto: The Women's Educational Press, 1982), Lynda Yanz et al. Policy Options to Improve Standards for Garment Workers in Canada and Internationally (Ottawa: Status of Women Canada, January 1999).

11. Laura Johnson and Robert Johnson, The Seam Allowance: Industrial Home Sewing in Canada ( Toronto: The Women's Educational Press, 1982).

12. See Lynda Yanz et al. Policy Options to Improve Standards for Garment Workers in Canada and Internationally (Ottawa: Status of Women Canada, January 1999).

13. I thank Dr. Linda Briskin, an expert on women and union, for pointing this out.

14. According to Jonathan Eaton, Assistant to the Canadian Director of UNITE, the present unionization rate in the garment sector is about 20 percent. It should be pointed out that sub-standard wages and working conditions exist in both home-based work and factories, especially if the latter are not unionized.

15. See Laura Johnson and Robert Johnson, The Seam Allowance: Industrial Home Sewing in Canada ( Toronto: The Women's Educational Press, 1982); Barbara Cameron with Teresa Mak, Working Conditions of Chinese-speaking Homeworkers in the Toronto Garment Industry: Summary of The Results of a Survey Conducted by the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (Toronto: ILGWU, 1991); Jan Borowy with Fanny Yuen, 'ILGWU 1993 Homeworkers' Study: an investigation into wages and working conditions of Chinese-speaking homeworkers in Metropolitan Toronto (Torotno: ILGWU, 1993).

16. For an excellent study that focuses specifically on policies, see Lynda Yanz et al. Policy Options to Improve Standards for Garment Workers in Canada and Internationally (Ottawa: Status of Women Canada, January 1999).

17. For an excellent study that focuses specifically on policies, see Lynda Yanz et al. Policy Options to Improve Standards for Garment Workers in Canada and Internationally (Ottawa: Status of Women Canada, January 1999).

18. For an excellent study that focuses specifically on policies, see Lynda Yanz et al. Policy Options to Improve Standards for Garment Workers in Canada and Internationally (Ottawa: Status of Women Canada, January 1999).

19. Press release by the Government of Canada, May 11, 1999, 9:55 a.m. EDT.

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